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SUBJECT: FINLAND COMMENTS ON FEBRUARY 23-24 GAERC

REF: FEBRUARY 12 2009 EMAIL

[¶1](#). Summary: PolOff met with Markku Lampinen, Finnish MFA Deputy European Correspondent on February 20 in advance of the GAERC. Lampinen said that the main topics this month will be Afghanistan and the Middle East. This GAERC represents the first discussion of the Eastern Partnership Initiative and therefore, it will be a preparatory discussion for the next GAERC and the EU Council Summit. The Foreign Ministers may discuss Sudan in particular if the ICC issues an arrest warrant for President Bashir; if so, Lampinen said the Foreign Ministers would likely present a common EU position. Lampinen expects the Western Balkans discussion to center around the High Representative appointment. The GAERC will comment on Sri Lanka and Iraq as "A" items, which have already been concluded and will not be discussed. End Summary.

[¶2](#). (SBU) Afghanistan: Lampinen listed three key issues on Afghanistan that will be discussed on Monday (February 23): (1) reinforcing EUPOL civilian crisis operations; (2) an EU political commitment message; and (3) support for Afghan presidential elections in August. Lampinen commented that EUPOL has had problems with a constant lack of personnel and EU will try to find a fix by the end of the summer to ensure operations continued credibility. He noted that Government of Finland (GoF) contributes more than 800,000 euro to EUPOL operations and plans to double the experts involved to 16 or [¶18](#). He stated that the expert compensation offered has failed to exceed local earnings making it unrewarding for Finns to volunteer. GoF agrees that August elections are a critical event and is sending a temporary 100 troop increase. Lampinen remarked that the parliamentary elections next year must be well organized and go smoothly to increase Afghan ownership of a lasting political solution. He agreed that broader regional cooperation, including with Pakistan, is necessary for to stabilize Afghanistan. He said that conclusions on Afghanistan are expected in March. Separately, Lampinen commented that the new Afghan Minister of Interior is contributing to better relations.

[¶3](#). (SBU) Gaza: Lampinen felt Gaza and the Middle East will be the second major topic, now post-Gaza and post-Israeli elections. He said that they will encourage the new Israeli government to commit to peace from the beginning, noting that one of the biggest obstacles is the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They will support Egyptian-led

efforts to mediate. Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb will participate in the humanitarian conference March 2. Lampinen commented that the EU's basic positions agree with those of the US, though he noted that Stubb has previously hoped for the inclusion of Hamas in the peace process. Lastly, investigation into breaches of humanitarian law in the Gaza conflict could come up. Lampinen does not expect conclusions from the Middle East discussion.

14. (SBU) Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP) and Western Balkans: On the EaP, Lampinen said that the GoF supports the commission's proposals to (1) strengthen sovereignty of the Eastern partner countries; (2) encourage internal reforms in those countries and; (3) engage on an EU relationship provided the countries are interested. He said that the GoF position is that the EU financing to partner countries should not diminish the EU funding of existing border projects like Cross-Border Cooperation within the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (CBC). The Western Balkans agenda may include the military crisis operation in Bosnia, which the GoF would like to see transformed into a training and support mission. (Note: GoF plans to withdraw most of its troops in Bosnia by June, leaving only 10. End note.) He did not expect the ministers to address the question of Montenegro's EU membership on Monday. Regarding ICTY, he noted, the EU Council may send its own delegation to evaluate Serbian cooperation. Lampinen felt Sir Emyr Jones Parry was most likely to be appointed High Representative.

15. (SBU) Sudan, Sri Lanka and Iraq: The discussion on Sudan depends on whether the ICC issues an arrest warrant for President Bashir before Monday. If the ICC issues the warrant, Foreign Ministers would likely present a common EU position. Lampinen noted the importance of continuing the peace process, UN operations and maintaining contact with the Sudanese government regardless. On Sri Lanka, he said that the EU will demand an immediate cease-fire, access to deliver humanitarian aid and safe exit from the conflict for civilians; the EU will demand that the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers respect international humanitarian law; and the EU will demand that the Tamil Tigers give up terrorism and violence. He further noted that a political solution is indispensable in creating sustainable peace in Sri Lanka and they would appeal for human rights and press freedoms there. Lampinen said that the EU will congratulate Iraq on successful local elections and thank UNAMI for its support and contributions. They will recognize the importance of elections to Iraqi national reconciliation and the EU will commit to continued support for the Iraqi election process. Lampinen said that the GoF's position is that the EU's aim should be internal stabilization of Iraq and normalization of its relations with its neighbors.

BUTLER